

From the Literary Panorama.

***A Tour through Sicily, in the year 1815.* By George Russell, of His Majesty's Office of Works. Illustrated by a Map and 18 Plates. 8vo. 1l. 1s. Sherwood & Co. London, 1819.**

This is an elegant and interesting publication. The author, (in common with many other Englishmen,) having been driven from Rome by the approach of the French army in 1815, proceeded, in company with some intelligent German gentlemen, to embark for the island of Sicily. We shall not detain our readers with any observations on the voyage, or the general account of that island, which occurs in the earlier part of the volume, but shall introduce them to the city of Palermo, of which we have a pleasing description. Among the various objects of attraction which this place contains, Mr. Russell failed not to visit the celebrated repository of the dead, in the Capuchin Convent, situated in its environs. In this cemetery

“The fathers and brothers of the order, after their decease, are placed in rows, perfectly upright, their backs being supported against dwarf walls, erected for that purpose. They are habited in the same sort of dress they had been accustomed to wear during their natural life, and bear a ticket on their breast, which denotes the time of their decease, and likewise their age.

“In this *cimiterio* we beheld, horribly exemplified by the varied appearances of more than five hundred human bodies, the grim tyrant death in all his different stages of decay, from the most perfect human, although cold and lifeless form, to, literally speaking, the mere skeleton. After the skeletons fall to pieces, the bones are carefully collected and symmetrically arranged against the walls, and the teeth are set in a spe-

cies of mosaic work, and form the front of the altar.

"While contemplating this region of the dead, and expressing our surprise at the sight of so many human beings who once lived and moved, our *cicerone* placed his finger under the chin of one whose face we were then earnestly viewing, and raised the body from the ground, as though it had been of paper; so light had this withered emblem of mortality become."

Literature and science are described as being at a low ebb; foreigners, however, and especially the English, are received with hospitality and attention. But the inhabitants, being under the domination of the Popish clergy, are exceedingly superstitious. The tutelary idol of Palermo is one Saint Rosalia, whose grotto our author visited. Her festival is celebrated with the utmost pomp and most extravagant rejoicings: though Mr. Russell had not an opportunity of witnessing its celebration, he has given us a lively description of it, derived from authentic sources, which we think will gratify our readers.

"The voluptuous, and, perhaps, monotonous life of the inhabitants of *Palermo* is interrupted by the annual *fete of Santa Rosalia*, certainly the most brilliant and enthusiastic display of devotion which exists at the present day in *Europe*. But as we frequently find at the opera, that the splendour exhibited in the ballets and *fetes* often obscures the general interest of the spectacle, so in these rejoicings, we equally lose sight of *Santa Rosalia*, if, at the end of the fifth day, after a most tumultuous procession, we did not behold the shrine of this holy saint.

"The car upon which this shrine is borne, is decorated, or rather overloaded, with ornaments of every species; it is drawn by forty mules, and filled by a considerable number of musicians. This enormous ma-

chine, certainly the richest and most magnificent ever put in motion, commences its march on the first day, without the shrine, from the *Marina*, and tremblingly traverses the *Cassaro* from the *Porta felice* to the royal palace, situated at the other extremity of this street. A grand display of fire-works here takes place, and the amusements of the day terminate by the *Cassaro* being splendidly illuminated.

"This street, decorated alternately with porticos and fountains along its whole length, which is upwards of a mile, upon a plan rather concave, presents, on this occasion, a *coup-d'œil* of the most pleasing nature.

"The people quietly promenade the *Cassaro* until midnight, when they retire, and the couches of the nobility arrive and take possession. The gravity of the *Sicilians* is conspicuous during the celebration of this festival: they partake of all its gayeties and pleasures without manifesting the slightest external symptoms of delight; and the various ceremonies pass off with a perfect regularity which never requires the interference of the police, although upwards of one hundred thousand persons are assembled together on the occasion.

"The principal amusements of the second day consist in their races: youths about twelve years of age ride the horses without saddle or bridle, and it is astonishing to see with what address they keep their seats. The horses are assembled and arranged behind a cord, where there is considerable difficulty to retain them: the animals being full of ardour, and, as it were, conscious they are going to contend for the prize, seem to strive to prevent each other from getting the foremost.

"Upon one of the senators, who is stationed in a species of booth, sounding a bell, the little jockies in-

stantly mount, and sit well advanced towards the shoulders, with their head almost reclining upon the neck of the horse. At the second sound the cord falls; the horses then set off, and, by the discharge of a cannon, the people are informed that they are on the way; the crowd immediately opens, and leaves a free passage for them to pass. Another senator, who is stationed at the extremity of the course, adjudges the prize; after which, the little jockey who has been successful, is carried in triumph, decorated with a golden eagle suspended around his neck, amid the acclamations of the assembled people.

“The horses are generally the property of rich individuals, and are trained and fed the whole year for this express purpose. The races occupy part of three days; the first is between country horses, the second between mares, and the third, which is by far the most rapid, between *Barbary* coursers.

“The amusements of the second day are completed by the car returning from the royal palace to the *Marina*, stopping almost every ten paces in order that the numerous spectators may enjoy the music: the car, as well as the *Cassaro*, are again most splendidly illuminated.

“The third day commences with another race, and the car also repeats its journey from the *Marina* to the palace. In the evening there is a grand display of fire-works upon the *Marina*: and the buildings contiguous to the port, as well as the *Cassaro*, are again illuminated in such a superb manner, that, viewed from the bay, it fills the imagination with the idea of an enchanted city.

“The diversion of the fourth day again commences with the course. Without comparing these races with those which take place in *England*—yet, from their rapidity, they are in no respect less interesting—the horses generally run the whole

length of the *Cassaro*, which is upwards of a mile, in less than a minute and a half.

“The evening of this day is particularly distinguished by a spectacle altogether new, and of which it is impossible to form an idea without having witnessed it. This superb spectacle is the illumination of the cathedral, which is executed in a manner truly enchanting. The interior of this vast edifice is so decorated, that the most pleasing effects are produced by merely introducing such trifles as fringes, garlands of various coloured papers, silver tissue, little pieces of glass, and many other articles of even less value: the whole is, however, so well arranged, and the church is lighted with so much taste, that, upon entering, it presents to the imagination the idea of being within the precincts of a fairy palace.

“The fifth and last day is celebrated by a long and continued procession, which commences shortly after the setting of the sun, and continues till one hour after midnight. It is upon this occasion that all the taste of the inhabitants of *Palermo*, for religious spectacles, is fully developed. Every confraternity, or religious order, bears in this procession a portrait or image as large as life of its particular saint. The charge of arranging the different toilets is wholly left to the nuns, who never fail, in dressing *Judith* or the *Holy Virgin*, to pay great attention *a la derniere mode*, or, in other words, to the last fashion imported from *Paris*.

“These representations of the different saints, enlivened by artificial rays, and ornamented with all sorts of garlands, are carried on a frame constructed of timber, which is borne on the shoulders of thirty or forty men, who consider they are achieving their own eternal salvation by carrying their particular saint faster than those behind, and thus

gaining time to make counter-marches and evolutions : at last, *Santa Rosalia*, in her triumphal car, solemnly traverses the *Cassaro*. The presence of their protectress considerably increases the universal joy of the people : as the holy saint approaches, every knee bends in pious adoration ; and thus terminates this most splendid *fete* of *Santa Rosalia*."

The present state of Segeste, and of Selinus, certainly one of the most splendid and magnificent cities ever founded by the Greeks, and also of Girgenti, the ancient Agrigentum, is described at considerable length ; but we have not room for any passages from this part of the volume, and selection would impair the interest which the lover of classical literature and antiquities would take in the perusal of them.

Having heard much, during his residence at Girgenti, respecting the singular kind of volcano, on the summit of Mount Macaluba, situated about six miles thence in the interior of the country, our Author and his companions accordingly visited this phenomenon ; and, as it has not been noticed by any preceding English travellers, we shall extract his description of it.

"This volcano of air, if we may so express ourselves, whose effects resemble those which have fire as their principal agent, has its moments of calmness as well as those of great fermentation and labour ; it produces, too, like other volcanoes, earthquakes, subterraneous thunder, and violent eruptions ; which last have, at times, thrown the matter so emitted more than one hundred feet above the summit of the craters.

"The base of *Macaluba* is nearly circular, and its height is about two hundred and fifty feet, taken from a valley which surrounds it : this valley is, however, considerably elevated above the level of the sea. Its summit is about half a mile in

circumference, and terminated by a plain presenting rather a convex surface ; it is besides extremely sterile. On this summit are a considerable number of little conic heights, the largest of which may be about nine feet in diameter ; and on the highest part of these cones, which are in general under five feet, are craters, whose depth we were unable to ascertain, being unprovided with a plumb-line, or any other contrivance by which such purpose could be effected. The soil appeared externally to be composed of clay, rather dry and cracked, and the hollow sepulchral noise, caused by the action of walking, excited our most serious attention, and reminded us that in all probability we were then over an immense gulf of liquid mud, separated only by a thin covering of clay.

The interiors of the craters is moist, and out of which there constantly issues a species of brown diluted clay, which, after reaching the height of the lips, or highest part, forms into little demi-globules ; a few moments after this formation has taken place, these globules break, and the confined air which they retained dispels itself ; the diluted clay then runs down the flanks of these heights, and extends itself more or less on every side. Upon introducing a pole about twelve feet long into several of the craters, we found it produced a kind of noise not unlike that of distant thunder : we observed upwards of one hundred and fifty of these craters in full action, beside many which had ceased to throw up the argillaceous matter, and our *cicerone* informed us that their number were continually varying, some, as he said, "dying away, and others as constantly breaking forth."

"It is generally believed, that in all volcanic eruptions fire acts as the principal agent : in this of *Macaluba*, however, the result is very different ; for after minute examination, not

only on the summit, but round the sides and base, we could perceive no trace of any such element having been concerned, either in the formation or working of this surprising production of nature: neither could we discover the least particle of any matter that had undergone the action of fire. We next immersed our thermometer in several of the craters, naturally expecting to find the temperature much higher than in the open air; but here, also, we found ourselves greatly deceived, the reverse being the result of the experiment. The thermometer so immersed, about nine o'clock in the morning, stood at 64° , according to *Fahrenheit*; but on being exposed to the atmosphere, it immediately rose to 72° : after this experiment, we no longer sought the igneous element."

Of Castro Giovanni, which stands on the site of the once celebrated Enna, we have a classical and antiquarian description, as also of the lake of Proserpine, and of the singularly romantic valley of Ipsica; places, which have been wholly unnoticed by those accurate travellers, Brydone and Swinburn. The ancient and modern state of Syracuse, of Catania, of Taormina, (the ancient Taurominium) and of Messina, together with the Cyclopiian and Ætolian or Lipari Islands, are respectively described at considerable length, and illustrated with numerous beautiful views. Of Mount Etna, which our author was prevented from ascending, by ill health, he has given an interesting and scientific account from his fellow travellers; but want of room compels us to omit several highly interesting passages, which we could wish to have extracted for the gratification of our readers.

The work is handsomely printed, and the maps and plates which accompany it, contribute not more to illustrate than adorn it. Mr. Russell's Tour fills up an important chasm in classical topography, and

justly claims a place in every well-selected library.